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\$60M Eureka cleanup

EPA, mining firm cut deal, but some residents are leery

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The Environmental Protection Agency and a Utah mining company have reached a \$60 million settlement in the cleanup of the Eureka Mills Superfund site in Juab County.

Under terms of the agreement filed Friday in U.S. District Court, Eureka-based Chief Consolidated Mining Co. will reimburse the agency with 15 percent of its net income above \$2 million per year and provide in-kind payment in the form of soil and fill material that the EPA will use to remediate affected homes and businesses and cap the mine waste piles at the Superfund site, located in Eureka.

The company, which owns 19,000 acres in the state, also will compensate the agency for its cleanup efforts through selling off some of its real estate holdings. Chief Consolidated's mining operations in Eureka are inactive; the mines have been closed since 1957.

"Chief Consolidated has worked well with us, and we've tried to work out an agreement that achieves some of our mandates, and at the same time, leave them viable financially," Paula Schmittiel, remedial project manager for the EPA's Denver office, said Friday. "We won't take all the proceeds; just a certain portion. We hope to leave them in a position where they can recover financially."

But that view is not shared in Eureka. Company officials were unavailable for comment Friday, but Mayor Lloyd Conder accused the agency of double-crossing Chief Consolidated - and the city.

"The EPA lied to us," Conder said. "They said they wouldn't take Chief to the cleaners. All they said they wanted was a place to put the [contaminated] material and close the mine waste dumps. Now they're saying Chief has to pay \$60 million, so they lied to the people, and it'll probably drive the company under."

Eureka Mills became a Superfund site in September of 2002 after as many as 450 homes were discovered to have been contaminated with lead and arsenic contamination from the former silver, gold, lead and mineral mines the company owned.

Some residents, including Conder, are skeptical about how contaminated the Superfund site is.

"Nobody's gotten sick or died," the mayor said. "As far as I'm concerned, it's a make-work project."

But Schmittiel calls Eureka Mills one of the larger project her EPA office has done, given its size and scope. Work has been ongoing since late 2002.

Schmittiel says that if federal funding is maintained, along with a 10 percent match from the state, another four or five years of remedial work still lies ahead.

"There is quite a bit of mine waste contamination," she said.

A century ago, Eureka was a booming mining town with 3,500 residents - and 35 saloons. The Tintic Mining District produced almost \$600 million in gold, silver and other minerals. But toxic dust from the mines settled in residents' yards, which produced the high lead and arsenic levels.

Conder says he and many of the city's 800 other residents have always hoped the mines would be reopened at some point - but he doubts that now.

"I hope I'm wrong," he said. "But I don't think it's going to happen."